SAINT PAUL POLICE URBAN LAB
BEST PRACTICES REPORT

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Introduction

The Saint Paul Police Department completed its second year of a community oriented policing "Urban Lab" in 1999, specializing in the documentation of problem solving strategies in a community of diverse and changing demography. The primary goals of the Urban Lab in 1999 were to begin a formal tracking process for problem solving, to boost the community problem solving effort by providing new tools for problem identification, and to provide a description of demography and demographic change in the neighborhood included by the Urban Lab. This guide is not a formal evaluation of the efficacy of the overall intervention in 1999. Rather, the purpose of this guide is to publish what we have learned, both medals and scars, with the hope that other agencies may learn from our efforts. It is an insider's report, founded on the observations of police personnel enmeshed in the project. In that vein, note that the guide is organized as a series of "bottom lines", the conclusions we feel are the most salient to other agencies, which are then followed by descriptive information specific to our experience.

The location of the Urban Lab is the Saint Paul West side, a distinct neighborhood geographically (bordered by the Mississippi on three sides), demographically (the largest population of Hispanic/Latino persons in Saint Paul), and culturally (most agree that the West side enjoys a distinct "flavor" with public murals, festivals, active community organizations, and several large families which have lived on the west side for multiple generations). The police department staffs a substation on the west side with one sergeant, fourteen officers, and one community liaison officer. For more information about the west side, please see Appendix I.

Previous years work on the west side laid a foundation of police-community relationships useful for problem solving (see the bottom-line principles under ***Policing Like A Tree***). A survey administered in 1998 as part of the urban lab evaluation revealed that officers on the west side tended to value community policing techniques more than officers in other areas of the city. The survey report also concluded that the community generally perceives the West side officers as "part of the community…friendly and respectful…when they are needed, they are there". On the other hand, the evaluation pointed out a sense of isolation among some groups such as Hmong residents, recent immigrants, and adolescents of color. Administrative challenges noted were the difficulty of coordinating efforts across law enforcement agencies, and a lack of opportunity/reward for officers to undertake active problem solving projects (*UMCPI Institute First Year Evaluation, Jan. 29, 1999*).

In 1999, the focus of the urban lab was to use informational technology to gain an understanding of demographic change on the west side and to strengthen problem solving efforts. One of our community partners, the Wilder Foundation, agreed to research already existing data related to demographics and to provide a descriptive report for the police and other community partners (see appendix I). In relation to problem solving, the grant provided for an analyst to design a problem-solving documentation method and several tools to fuel problem identification and analysis. The SARA (Scan, Analysis, Response, Assessment) model was adopted to create a tracking sheet and accompanying database for tracing problem-solving efforts (see appendix II). Officers were trained in the use of the SARA tracking sheets (STS) and community leaders were also provided copies. Twenty-seven STS were accomplished or underway at the time of this report. The STS covered a varied range of topics:

- Quality of life behavior issues (narcotics, prostitution, disorderly conduct, etc.) -- 8
- Nuisance/Property complaints -- 6
- Issues associated with bars -- 5
- Establishments with repeated false alarms -- 4
- Traffic Issues -- 2
- Drive-by shootings -- 1

- Intervention for specific offenders -- 1

It was approximately an even split between STS generated by community concerns and those identified by police officers or police research.

After a problem was initially described in the Scan section of an STS, it was forwarded to the SPPD R&D Unit where each problem received customized analysis which might include various mapping techniques or queries of the police database. This portion of the STS was entered into the SARA tracking sheet database maintained by R&D before being sent back to the west side sergeant for completion. Using the original information from the scan section, in conjunction with the analysis, the primary officer assigned (POA) to the problem could then provide a more complete summary of the problem and recommendation for interventions. The sergeant could then approve it for the response section or close it (if, for example, the problem was determined to be unfounded by analysis). Stakeholder and police roles were defined under response and comments from both stakeholders and police were included under Assessment. R&D then received the final sheet, added any relevant measurements for assessment, and completed the form in the SARA tracking sheet database. The database can be used to report on issues such as the following:

- How many STS were started between ___ and ___?
- Which STS have the words "narcotics" or "drugs" in it (or any words)?
- How many total hours has officer ___ worked on problem solving projects in the past month?

For more information on establishing a formal tracking system for problem-solving, and avoiding pitfalls, see the bottom-line principles under ***Form-alizing Problem Solving***.

Overall, we have concluded to continue problem-solving documentation using SARA tracking sheets. Despite a number of challenges associated with adding another form to police paper work, and one more priority for information systems technology, we believe that active problem solving contributes to *efficient* policing. Identifying problems proactively, either through community stakeholders or by harnessing the enormous amount of police data collected for administrative purposes, is policing *before* the crisis. Bottom-line principles we have learned through the urban lab associated with this topic are listed under ***Finding Problems Before They Find You***.

Policing Like a Tree

The point of policing like a tree is establishing yourself as a "home-grown", long-lasting contributor to the community you serve. Policing like a tree includes fostering long term growth in the roots by establishing a commitment unique to each neighborhood; branching out with diverse partnerships often created before any crisis; and harvesting a continuous cycle of leaves and fruit through active problem solving. It is allowing the police department to evolve with individual communities such that it wouldn't *fit* to transplant one tree wholesale to another community.

Roots: Establish a commitment unique to the community.

Our practice with problem solving in the urban lab this year has led us to an important conclusion: most efforts were founded on partnerships that already existed, and those partnerships were largely created out of a few major police commitments made several years previous. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the west side community values the west side officers as *their* officers and the west side Substation as *their* police station. A significant commitment was made

to the west side by the Police Department in 1994 with three major ingredients: establishment of the substation, a new flexible hours sergeant's position, and a commitment to recruit bilingual officers to the west side. It has been this commitment, in response to the requests of that community, that has opened up more dialogue with community partners.

The substation staffs one sergeant (Art Guerrero, who has served in this capacity since the substation's establishment and who speaks English and Spanish), 14 officers, a community liaison officer, and a data analyst from the R&D unit. The substation itself is the fruit of a major partnership with Wilder as it is located in the bottom level of hi-rise. Although the building is secured for the sake of the residents, walk-ins are welcome during certain hours. Sgt. Guerrero is allowed to work varying hours according to community meeting schedules and the needs of the officers on the west side. This flexibility in the sergeant's position, in conjunction with Sgt. Guerrero's bilingual ability has greatly increased police/community relations on the west side. In fact, we discovered that the problem solving process on the west side was carried out differently than what is documented for other locations in that most officers preferred to leave follow-up and other key interactions with community partners to Sgt. Guerrero. Whether this is preferable or not, the main point for now is that we believe many of the good community relationships we enjoy are a result of roots planted several years ago: the police restructuring specifically for the community.

The command staff overseeing the urban lab have also noted some of the challenges agencies face when sinking in roots. Overall, the difficulty is establishing permanence with the community when the police department itself must be somewhat fluid with personnel. For example, a recent explosion of retirements in SPPD has churned officer assignments across the city. While this is necessary for the department as a whole, commanders note the difficulty of creating problem-solvers dedicated to working out long term solutions amidst frequent assignment change. Also, there are some disadvantages with implementing this style of policing as a *special project* in that extra administrative work basically falls on command personnel with many already existing duties and other units are not always supportive of the *special* project's *special* goals/needs. Perhaps these issues will be solved if the combination of hiring, training, and transferring can overtake the words *special* and *extra* in the police attitude of community oriented policing.

Branches: Create major partnerships before the problem.

Perhaps the most prominent strength of problem oriented policing on the west side is the rich relationships the police department enjoys with community organizers. A sample of important, non-traditional ways the west side officers are involved in the community include the following:

- Riverview Economic Development Association - officers have been involved in teaching security seminars for business owners and been part of a redevelopment committee for a key commercial strip (and also crime hot spot).
- Bar Owners Association - west side supervisors often attend a monthly meeting. Officers have also provided training for bar staff relating to serving minors or intoxicated individuals.
- LIEP - west side supervisors organized a key training session with police officers and an officer from St. Paul Licensing, Inspection, & Environmental Protection to discuss the process of enforcing liquor laws, peddlers, license violations, etc.
- Guadalope Alternative Program (GAP) - sergeant is on the executive board for this alternative learning school. Officers also serve as mentors from time to time.
- Monday Night Live - officers offer security and mentoring for this eight week annual curriculum which offers hobby classes and other constructive entertainment for youth.

- Neighborhood House - among other forms of involvement, officers participate in a Hands Are Not For Hitting program in which pre-schoolers learn about domestic abuse, the role of police, and alternatives for coping with domestic abuse.
- Block Clubs and West side Safe Neighborhood Council - the community liaison officer, sergeant, or other officers often attend block club meetings and coordinate with the West side Safe Neighborhood Council which is also a grass roots organization concerned with safety on the west side.
- Schools - officers participate in various programs in elementary, middle, and high schools in coordination with school liaison officers.
- Public Housing Authority (PHA) - west side supervisors have sought to supplement services to residents of public housing by advertising assistance available from a Hmong-speaking west side officer.

Although a couple of these collaborations have been developed in the past year, most have grown from several years of coordination, often before any specific crisis was at hand.

The police occupy a unique role among community organizers on the west side. Not all of the community organizers see eye-to-eye of course. So, besides the projects taken on with individual groups, the police department serves as a common denominator among community groups in general, sometimes simply getting other organizers around the same table.

Leaves and Fruit: Active Problem Solving

Guidelines describing the benefits of problem solving and using the SARA model already exist ("Problem-Solving Tips", USDOJ, COPS is a good resource). The observation we would like to add is that there are significant benefits from establishing roots and branches *before, and not necessarily related to, any specific problem*. The two principal advantages are as follows:

1. *A community wide solution is better and more quickly deployed should a serious safety problem arise if partnerships are already in place.* By way of example, Sara Tracking Sheet #10 was created after two drive-by shootings occurred on the west side at school bus stops. Both shootings occurred in morning hours near a public housing complex and were thought to be related to a conflict between two Asian-member gangs. Several forums for community discussion were organized with the West side Substation involving residents and partners from West Side Safe Neighborhood Council, Neighborhood House, PHA at Dunedin, and St. Paul schools. Police extended efforts of a state gang task force by organizing a St. Paul Gang Task Force to gather intelligence on suspects and follow up with gang members individually (via schools, probation officers, home visits, etc.). Officers on this task force also consulted with Lao Family and Hmong American Partnership. Community organizations helped collect resident input, diffuse alarm, and promote prevention strategies. Although this effort may have existed in some form without already existing partnerships, it would surely have been bogged down compared to the more organized reaction that took place.
2. *Problems can be identified and intervened with earlier if partnerships precede problems.* Although there is nothing wrong with developing new partnerships when new problems arise, there are benefits of discovering problems earlier in their development because of a partnership that already exists. For example, several Sara Tracking Sheets were undertaken for different problems in a key commercial strip on the West side. Although each sheet documented some effort taken to stifle the individual problems, the most long-term solutions were actually already underway in partnership with the Riverview Economic Development Association. The entire commercial strip is in the design stage of a major redevelopment with

west side substation staff participation in the re-design committee (including one officer trained in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design who worked directly with the architect). The redesign will consider the challenges associated with all the conditions of the area (traffic, loitering, graffiti, etc.) and will improve the overall environment effecting each problem documented on separate tracking sheets.

"Form"-alizing Problem Solving

What is *formal* problem solving? Because we assumed that officers working in the urban lab were undertaking some problem solving as part of their normal working habits already, formalizing problem solving essentially meant adding forms. Without any documentation of problem solving efforts, we really couldn't describe how well it was being done, or how often. In addition, without a formal documentation of problem solving efforts, it was not possible to account for this important aspect of police work on performance evaluations. Other reasons we introduced forms (Sara Tracking Sheet) to the west side officers are the following:

- To reinforce parts of the SARA process often passed over (Analysis and Assessment, stakeholder input).
- To encourage officers to problem-solve.
- To provide something specific for supervisors to follow up with officers.

The primary obstacle we found with formalizing problem solving is avoiding *the worksheet mentality*. The worksheet mentality is that special form of work most of us recall from grade school when we had to put something in each blank of a numberless series of worksheets that we didn't see the point of. Because police officers deal with a lot of paperwork, and a lot of duplicated information on that paperwork, they are prime candidates for the worksheet mentality when a new form is introduced. We found the worksheet mentality most often cropping up for cases with one of the following conditions: the problem was too small for the process, there was a lack of focus on finding the *long-term* solution, or there was a lack of follow-up.

Define problems large enough to support SARA's A's.

Because we were not sure what kinds of problems to which the SARA model could best be applied, we decided to document *all* problems (community complaints/concerns) on STS at first. The problem with this is that SARA is a *thorough* problem-solving process requiring officers to go the extra mile in several aspects; trying to apply it to problems such as "Unknown vehicle drops small rocks in front of complainant's house" gets bureaucratic as officers see no point in sending the STS to R&D for crime analysis, nor for spending time recruiting community stakeholders. Problems have to be *project*-level, not *incident*-level in order to justify the extra work of Analysis and Assessment. A good guideline indicating a problem is too small for this kind of documentation would be the question, "Is this problem most likely going to have a long-term solution after a single visit from an officer?". If it's a "done-deal" by the time you finish writing the Scan section, there's no point prolonging the problem through the rest of the SARA process. If, on the other hand, the problem is something an officer can really sink their teeth into, the sheet makes sense.

Fixate on the long-term solution.

Another helpful principle for completing the entire process of SARA problem solving is to fixate on the long-term solution. Police work has many immediate and intermediate consequences. The ability to quickly and effectively *react* will always be an important part of police work. However, in working with community partners on project-level problems, police work should be clearly focused on *the long-term* solution.

We found the statement from "Problem-Solving Tips" to be true: "From the outset, one is constantly battling a natural tendency to revert to traditional responses" ("Problem-Solving Tips", USDOJ, COPS, p.14). In fact, traditional responses such as extra details are often a meaningful *part* of a long-term plan. Braga et al note that tactics such as "repeat foot and radio car patrols, dispersing groups of loiterers, issuing a summons for public drinking, and 'stop and frisks' of suspicious persons" were universally employed as meaningful aspects of SARA interventions designed for hot spots of violence ("Problem-Oriented Policing In Violent Crime Places: A Randomized Controlled Experiment", Criminology, V.37, #3, 1999). Often, community partners think of police in their traditional role and they expect these kind of efforts. In one case in the urban lab, we found that business owners actually preferred police to just keep up the extra patrol because they (the owners) were unwilling to invest in the longer-term solution (relocating a pay phone) recommended by the CPTED officer.

Nevertheless, SARA-worthy problems by their very nature (recurring, clustering, related set of circumstances) beg for someone to take a deeper look and find a deeper solution. The real difference in terms of police work is that long-term solutions are almost always *largely outside of the police's control*. The problem simply won't be warned, frisked, tagged, or arrested away. They require serious commitment on the part of community members involved. They require coordinating with other city or jurisdictional agencies; they require business owners to invest in safety; they require residents to take interest in non-crises. Working for the long-term solution may mean a police officer is more involved in meetings, analysis, reporting, persuasion than he/she is used to because it is largely *people other than the police officer* who has the most ability to effect the long-term solution. But the officer's role should not be undermined: without him/her serving as a catalyst, the cooperative community reaction may never take place. As part of formalizing problem solving, it is vital that the individual officer gain an understanding and respect for this role; the agent over the long-term.

Know who is in charge of follow-up.

Who needs to know, and which stage of follow-up? Everyone needs to know for every level of follow-up. An officer follows-up with stakeholders, a sergeant follows-up with the officer, a commander follows up with the sergeant, and an analyst follows-up with everyone to track the progress of the sheet. Accountability and follow-up are nothing new, but we would like to briefly underscore their importance when implementing a new form. Although we designed the Sara Tracking Sheet to shape the way officers carried out the problem solving process, only effective, personal follow-up can quickly resolve concerns and communicate expectations on completing the problem solving process.

For example, there is a significant difference between stakeholders listed as "residents of the west side" and "Sally Doe who lives one block from the problem". The first is a hypothetical stakeholder, who can provide hypothetical input, carry out plans hypothetically, and have assumed assessment provided for them. The second is a real person capable of providing real insight, carrying out real plans, and having real opinions regarding the efficacy of such plans. Either one, however, can be worked through the form depending on how active the steering influence of follow-up is.

Although everyone generally agrees that follow-up is important, it is also important that everyone recognize who is responsible for follow-up at each stage.

Finding Problems Before They Find You

It has previously been mentioned that having solid partnerships in place can be a source of identifying problems in earlier stages of development. Another way that police departments can become more proactive about identifying police business in earlier stages is learning to use police data. Probably all police departments are required to maintain some elements of crime information for administrative reporting (most collect a wide array of information for F.B.I. UCR or NIBRS reporting). If this information is stored electronically, there is a wide expanse of tools to extract and help make meaning out of it for strategic purposes. Of course, developing tools to make meaning out of data is also useful in the analysis stage so that efforts can be correctly focused (or, in some instances, discontinued). This section briefly discusses use of police data in the problem-solving process and provides a few examples of tools used in the urban lab.

Recipe for cutting through drawn-out, ambiguous complaints and foggy interventions: data.

Police-community teamwork is essentially a pact "to do the best we can with what we have" to curb some large-scale problems resistant to change. Unlike other occupational decisions which may be delayed or dismissed, police business often *requires* an immediate solution, whether the problem is entirely understood or not. Police officers are expected to respond, to quench, to calm, and to solve; often when the only practical deadline is "now" and in the midst of a personally hostile climate. It may not be surprising then if police officers aren't inclined to wait for data; they generally don't have a social scientist's luxury of saying, "we don't know, we've never measured that". Community stakeholders too feel a sense of urgency with the problems that plague their neighborhood and may not always have the information needed to give a clear diagnosis. The result can be a poorly defined problem receiving foggy interventions which won't work and so the problem becomes drawn-out.

In contrast, data can do a great deal to diffuse alarm, clarify complaints, and indicate specific solutions. No one is advocating that police data (or any data) is perfect, nor that data itself should *decide* problems. But, most problems can be substantially better *defined* and dealt with when police data is added to the mix. For the most part, police officers and community stakeholders know this and are sometimes frustrated because they simply cannot access crime information accurately and quickly.

Harness the information explosion.

On the high end of informational technology for police are record management systems with completely paperless, wireless records systems, user-friendly intranet/internet applications, and GPS/GIS-guided CAD. Somewhere between there and pencil and steno pad are the rest of us. An important aspect of harnessing the information explosion is putting to use the tools you already have while waiting for development plans to take shape. While we are not advocating use of any specific software, we conclude with descriptions and examples of three kinds of crime information reports used in the urban lab:

1. Repeat Names Report - This report is created by querying counts per name from a database of information related to persons entered on police reports. As noted in "Problem-Solving Tips" (COPS Office, pg.2), "research has shown that a relatively small number of locations and offenders are involved in a relatively large amount of crime" and "a small number of victims account for a relatively large amount of victimization". Thus, the Repeat Names Report reveals which people are most often

involved with the police (relating to specific crimes on the West side), whether they are victims, suspects, arrestees, etc.. Reports similar to this were created to reveal locations which are most accident prone (counts of traffic accidents per intersection) and locations with costly false alarm problems. Working with SQL and an Oracle database, once the queries have been written for these reports, they would take less only a few minutes to produce.

2. Juvenile Violent Crimes in St. Paul West side - a map created with MapInfo utilizing an aerial photo and counts of juvenile crime incidents (incidents referred to SPPD juvenile unit for homicide, rape, highway robbery, agg. assault, simple assault having an occurrence date between 01-sep-97 and 31-aug-99). The aerial photo is registered to fit with the county parcel information so other applications of this kind of map could include officers obtaining important logistical information about a property before conducting a search warrant, or accessing information about who is the resident and who is the fee holder (useful for working with landlords on problem properties).
3. Crime Analysis for STS 52 - this map was generated to investigate a complaint of disorderly behavior on the highlighted street section. It is an example of analysis helping to redefine the problem. The officer can use this as a visual to encourage reporting the incidents at the time they occur (since they haven't been previously) and as a catalyst for conversation of solutions.